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Male and female murderers in newspapers: Are they portrayed differently?

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Abstract

This research aims to identify any similarities and differences in the reporting of male and female murderers in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. In order to gain a stronger insight into the issue, two case studies have been selected, one male and one female.

Through the method of thematic analysis, this article examines how the female serial murderer Joanna Dennehy was represented compared with the male serial murderer Stephen Griffiths in a selection of articles from national newspapers. During this process, reoccurring themes were discovered that are discussed in the analysis. These themes are 'labelling' and 'blaming others'. 'Labelling' is divided into sub-themes of 'mental illness' and 'sexualisation and de-humanisation'.

The aforementioned themes are discussed in the analysis. It was found that the gender of a serial murderer does dictate how they are portrayed in tabloid newspapers. This is also true for broadsheet newspapers to a lesser extent. For example, this research shows that Joanna Dennehy is represented as mentally ill, whereas this is not as prominent for Stephen Griffiths, despite him committing similar acts. Furthermore, Dennehy is de-humanised in both types of newspaper, although to a greater degree in tabloid newspapers. It was discovered that Griffiths was not subjected to the same de-humanisation.

These findings concur with previous research outlined in the literature review, though the themes mentioned in the discussion do not occur as blatantly as some researchers suggest they do for other female murderers in the media.

Key words: Broadsheet newspapers; gender representation; media representation; serial murderers; tabloid newspapers.

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Introduction

The aims for this research were:

- to explore whether murderers are represented differently according to their gender in tabloid newspapers;
- to explore whether murderers are represented differently according to their gender in broadsheet newspapers.

This research focused on the representation of one male murderer, Stephen Griffiths, and one female murderer, Joanna Dennehy, in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. Stephen Griffiths murdered three female sex workers in Bradford in 2009–2010. In 2013 Joanna Dennehy murdered three men in Peterborough and attempted to murder two more in Hereford. These two cases were chosen because they are the most recent and the most similar cases available. Both individuals murdered three people and they both received a similar amount of coverage. Two murderers were studied rather than a higher number because this allowed the case studies to be analysed in depth. Furthermore, murderers are rare, especially those given extensive coverage. Adding more murderers to the sample would have meant including murderers from different time periods and countries, and this would have made them less comparable. This could have weakened the findings of the research.

The media plays a role in shaping the public's perception of crime and this makes it a suitable area to study. This research was undertaken from a feminist perspective. This is because feminist researchers are interested in the differences in how gender is represented and the impact this has on issues in the social world. The rationale for undertaking this research is that it is important to understand the reasons for any disparities in reporting of male and female murderers in both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. Establishing an understanding of newspapers' influence on people's perception of crime and gender can enable such views to be challenged. This is especially important in view of any patriarchal bias that the media may be found to support. Recently, women have achieved greater equality with men than over the past century in terms of legislation and rights (Tracy, Kempf-Leonard, & Abramson-James, 2009). However, in some areas, such as newspaper reporting, women are still subject to subordination through the repeated expectation of traditional patriarchal values (Evans, 2012).

Both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers were studied to allow a comparison to be made. It was useful to analyse both types of newspaper as they differ in their values, audience and writing style. Different types of newspaper also take different political stances. For example, *The Guardian* is left-wing and the *Daily Mail* is right-wing. Where a newspaper lies on the political spectrum can influence how it represents gender. Therefore, examining both types of newspaper allowed the researcher to see if perceptions of male and female murderers fluctuated between each owing to their differing values, audience and function.

Sixteen samples of newspaper articles were selected from the academic search engine, Summon. Half were tabloid and half were broadsheet. These articles were chosen out of many that were available because they directly related to the research. The 16 chosen also had interesting content that allowed for a deep analysis, consequently leading to a more detailed discussion of the themes.

Thematic analysis was used to draw out the main themes arising from the newspaper articles that were analysed. Thematic analysis is a method 'used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The use of this method allowed dominant themes to emerge from the data (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). Thematic analysis was relevant for this research because it is a systematic and transparent form of qualitative method owing to the prevalence of themes, and it still allows for a deep analysis (Joff, 2012). Conversely, thematic analysis can only rely on the outcomes it generates and has a lack of control; in other words, 'anything goes' (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2002; Silverman, 1993). Boyatzis (1998) also states that it is subjective in terms of the researcher's interpretations. It can be argued that themes do not just 'reside' in the data; rather, they 'emerge' as a result of researchers making links as they understand them (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). This can lead to researcher bias. To combat this, the researcher in this report tried to remain objective when identifying themes in this study by analysing the data with an open mind. Despite the weaknesses of this approach, thematic analysis remained a suitable method to utilise in this research as it is flexible and allows for rich detail, creating a broad potential for analysis.

Thematic analysis was chosen over other methods, such as content analysis, because it is considered to be a more theoretically flexible approach to qualitative research. Therefore, it was a strong choice for this research as it does not constrain the direction of the study. It is not as limited in how it can be applied to research, unlike conversation analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There were no ethical issues to consider in this research, as all information was available in the public domain. The British Society of Criminology (2006) states that the physical and mental wellbeing of participants should not be affected by research and that participants should have the right to withdraw from the research. However, these points did not apply to this research as it is a documentary analysis and therefore involves no participants. Although this documentary analysis has no ethical issues pertaining to research, it is in the public domain and can affect people who are closely related to the case studies. It is an emotional topic that includes friends and family of those involved, and this may be considered an ethical issue.

This study aimed to contribute to the literature that has already been written on the topic in order to add to the understanding of any gender inequalities in the reporting of violent crime in newspapers. Despite the abundance of literature on crime and gender (Frei, 2008; Heidensohn, 2000; Jewkes, 2011; Wykes, 1998), there is a lack of research on how gender is portrayed in the newspapers in relation to violent crime. Furthermore, much of the literature was written in the 1990s; therefore, this article aimed to update findings in this area. This was necessary, as reporting may have changed over the past decade and a half owing to issues such as the increased sexualisation of women in men's magazines and the rise of the media on the internet.

Literature review

In order to discuss issues relating to the media, it is apt to define the two types of newspaper that were analysed: tabloid and broadsheet. The difference between the

two lies in how they address their readers. Hanusch (2013, p. 499) describes tabloids as 'the popular press' that specialise in sensation and scandal. Örnebring and Jönsson (2004, p. 283) state that tabloid journalism 'allegedly panders to the lowest common denominator of public taste, it simplifies, it personalises, it thrives on sensation and scandal'. On the other hand, broadsheet newspapers are the 'elite' of newspapers and aim to educate their readers. They are written in a more serious tone than tabloids, and there is less emotion in broadsheet reporting (Hanusch, 2013).

This research looked at newspaper articles from both a feminist and a social constructionist point of view. The purpose of a feminist methodology in social research is to point out problems with gendered social realities (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). Gender played a major part in this research, and it is something that is not defined in many pieces of academic work. Gender is not synonymous with sex. Rather, it covers 'how people experience sexuality, reproduction, masculinity and femininity, and the boundaries between them' (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 4). Feminism became prominent within criminology in the 1960s (Heidensohn, 2012) and in the past the main aim of feminism was the promotion of equal rights for women.

Social constructionism emerged in the 1980s as an attempt to come to terms with the nature of reality and to understand how knowledge is constructed and understood. It is anti-realist and views knowledge as constructed rather than pre-made (Andrews, 2012); therefore, it takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2003). Burr (2003, p. 3) explains that social constructionism takes a critical view of gender and sex, and questions whether the categories 'men' and 'women' simply describe 'naturally occurring distinct types of human being'. Knowledge is historically and culturally relative. For instance, Burr (2003) uses the example of childhood: two centuries ago, children were viewed as small adults, whereas today they are seen as innocent and in need of protection. Social constructionism aims to challenge the notion that our knowledge is based on an unbiased and objective observation of the world, and aspires to oppose essentialism. Social constructionism will help the reader to understand how the genders may be portrayed differently in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, depending on whether or not the journalists take an objective view.

Biological essentialism sees gender as defined by genetics and biological differences. For example, women are more nurturing owing to differences in their hormones compared to men, who are naturally more aggressive because of higher levels of testosterone. Biological essentialism is criticised by social constructionists as it tends to be highly deterministic: it traps people inside identities that are limiting. Burr (2003) points out that biological essentialism states that people only have sex in order to reproduce. However, if the purpose of sex is purely to procreate, then surely there would not be as much variation in human sexual practices as there is compared to other species. Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers (2001) explain that biological theories are highly speculative and could tell a believable story to explain the opposite state of affairs from the gender differences we usually see. These biological theories aim to clarify what is natural, and such theories can arise when people want to defend gender inequalities. Biological theorists have a longstanding tendency to make social and economic inequalities between men and women seem

normal. Bem (1993, cited in Gaunt, 2006, p. 523) states that overemphasising biology and not taking historical and social context into account makes these inequalities seem unavoidable, whereas if shown in a historically constructed light, these issues can be seen as variable.

There has long been a need for eye-catching headlines and stories that interest readers in order to persuade them to buy newspapers. This means that stories that are the most 'newsworthy' are printed. Chibnall (1977, cited in Greer, 2003, p. 43) suggests eight imperatives that stories should possess: immediacy, dramatisation, structured access, novelty, titillation, conventionalism, personalisation and simplification. In order to be newsworthy, a newspaper story should possess at least a couple of these imperatives. Seriousness and novelty are the primary determinants of crime (Greer, 2003). Thus, crime possesses some of the imperatives suggested by Chibnall, and this makes it a newsworthy topic. This is reflected in the statistics regarding the reporting of crime: Greer (2003) states that crimes involving violence and sex together constitute 2.4% of real crime, but 45.8% of newspaper coverage. The media is prominent in shaping the public's perception of issues, and Greer (2007) suggests that the media influences the public's attitude towards offenders. This can lead to misconceptions and sensationalised reporting.

There is an abundance of literature within criminology regarding the media and newspapers; however, there is a lack of research into how the media represents female offenders. In the past, research undertaken on women in relation to violence has looked at domestic violence and has neglected to research women who perpetrate violence themselves (Weare, 2013). It has been argued that the reason for this is because women committing such offences are a rare phenomenon (Morrissey, 2003). There is a need for further research into this area, as Brennan and Vandenberg (2009, p. 143) state that 'we know little about how women who commit crime are portrayed by the media'.

There seems to be general consensus in the literature that serious female offenders are depicted as 'others' in the media, especially if they do not conform to what society perceives as 'normal behaviour' for a woman. This includes being a 'good mother', having a 'nurturing' personality and being 'a good wife', among other traits. This is reflective of a biological essentialist view. Jewkes (2004) points out that women who challenge stereotypes such as being a 'good mother' or a 'good wife' are treated worse in the media than those who do not. A woman who has committed a serious, violent crime is said to be a transgressor of the law, but also of the laws of nature. Lloyd (1995, cited in Snider, 2003, p. 355) describes these women as 'doubly deviant and doubly damned'. Lloyd (1995) states that female offenders are judged more harshly for their crimes because they have broken the law in a moral sense as well as in a legal sense. Jewkes (2004) points out an example of this in the media: Myra Hindley took part in the murders of five children in the 1960s, and this cast a longer shadow in terms of media reporting than the case of Harold Shipman, a doctor who murdered between 150 and 350 patients. This example illustrates the disparity in the amount of media coverage received by women compared to men, even when their crimes are not as extensive.

Wykes (1998) states that contemporary media reflect other socio-political institutions in their attitudes to marriage and family, which are old fashioned and what Jewkes

(2004, p. 109) calls 'curiously embedded in the Victorian age'. In the media's view, women should be passive, maternal, married and monogamous. Anything deviating from the norm, such as single mothers and LGBTA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, asexual) people, are subject to hostile representation. Jewkes (2011) suggests that women are described as either sexually promiscuous or frigid. If no reference to their sexual background can be found, the media resort to labelling the woman as 'frigid'. Wykes (1998) states that anything different is portrayed as deviance in relation to female offenders. However, Wykes' (1998) view can be challenged here. It can be argued that a left-wing broadsheet newspaper such as *The Guardian* may not hold these views.

Women are also placed into one of three categories by the media: 'mad', 'sad' or 'bad'. Women who kill are sometimes represented as 'mad'. This stems from 19th-century pioneers such as Lombroso and Freud who put forward the idea that female offending is linked to pathology (Jewkes, 2004). Heidensohn (2000) says that menstruation and the menopause are treated as inherently pathological states that 'explain' female offending. This view is reflective of biological essentialism.

A woman who kills her child and is diagnosed with a mental illness such as post-partum depression is labelled as either 'mad' or 'sad', an example being Andrea Yates, who murdered her five children in the United States. On the other hand, if a woman who commits filicide is not found to have a mental illness, she is labelled as 'bad'. These women are not just bad because they have committed murder, they are bad because they have murdered their own children and destroyed the construction of motherhood for women. 'Bad' women are deemed to be 'evil' in the eyes of the media. They are devoid of excuses and deserve punishment to the fullest extent of the law (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002).

In contrast to female offenders, male offenders receive a distinctly different type of coverage in newspapers when they commit a serious crime such as murder. For example, they are not sexualised and their personal lives are not scrutinised to the same extent. In the early days of criminology, crime was mainly explained from a biological perspective. Such explanations, such as Lombroso's now disproved theory that criminals have certain physical characteristics, have led to the development of a theoretical link between masculinity and male offending. Through this link, aggression and dominance have become almost synonymous with male perpetrators, and this is reflected in how men are portrayed in newspapers (Herrington & Nee, 2005).

The focus on biological essentialism as an explanation for offending has reduced in recent times owing to the lack of an explanation for the majority of men who do not offend. Social explanations now dominate, and the public have been socialised into the mentality that it is normal for a man to offend but abnormal for a woman to do so (Herrington & Nee, 2005). Therefore, when a man commits a heinous crime such as murder, it is still horrifying in the public's eye, but not quite so appalling as if a woman had done the same. Sometimes, when a man commits murder, the media displace the blame onto a woman instead of holding the male perpetrator responsible. For example, Peter Sutcliffe's wife, Sonia Sutcliffe, received bad press and was partly blamed for his murders because of her inability to conceive, her inadequacies as a sexual partner and her failure as a wife (Jewkes, 2011).

Men are not subjected to the same amount of scrutiny of their sexuality as women are (Marsh & Melville, 2009). They do not experience the same amount of intrusion into their personal lives. Jewkes (2011) states that men are seldom described as 'bad fathers' in the way that women are portrayed as 'bad mothers'. For example, Fred West's fathering abilities were never commented on in the press. The press commented on Rosemary's 'willing participation' in the murders, but did not reflect upon Fred's equally willing participation (Jewkes, 2004). Naylor (2001) found that these disparities were due to male violence being seen as 'normal' in the British media.

Most academics concur that female murderers are treated differently to male murderers in the media. However, there are some disagreements in the literature. Frei (2008) states that women who commit murder are rarely depicted as dangerous in comparison to their male counterparts. Their behaviour is never depicted as harmful, unlike male offending. Frei's (2008) opinion, however, seems to be refuted by most academics. Jewkes (2004), for example, continually points out terms such as 'monster' and 'dangerous', which are used in abundance to describe female murderers; in contrast, male murderers are described as 'hardworking' and as 'providers'.

From the literature it is evident that the media relies on biological essentialist views to put across their stories relating to both male and female murderers. From an essentialist view, females are seen as being closer to nature through giving birth and menstruation. From this, it is widely assumed that females are naturally caring, emotional and maternal (Marsh & Melville, 2009). However, social constructionism refutes this theory and proposes that social norms that are proposed as acceptable for women are constructed by a heteropatriarchal society.

As a result of these patriarchal constructions, the literature has shown that women are judged in a different manner to men by the media. Women are not expected to commit violent and serious crimes, and because of this they are portrayed differently in newspapers, as has been demonstrated by the reporting of Rosemary West and Fred West, among others (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009). Feminist critics state that the media magnify deep fears that the public may have about female offenders, but the media do not apply the same method towards male offenders, mainly because men do not fit the psycho-social criteria of 'otherness' (Jewkes, 2004). This asymmetry in the media deems 'normal' patterns of delinquency in men as 'wayward' and in women as 'amoral' (Jewkes, 2011). The reason for the difference in reporting is that females committing serious crimes are a novelty. It is likely to always be the case that men commit more crimes than women; thus, as Jewkes (2011, p. 150) states, '...it is unlikely that there will ever be a climate of opinion which views these crimes as mundane or humdrum'.

Findings and analysis

The findings of this research highlighted two broad themes that were identified through the thematic analysis of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers regarding Stephen Griffiths and Joanna Dennehy. These are 'labelling' and 'blaming others'.

'Labelling' can be split into sub-themes of 'mental illness' and 'sexualisation and de-humanisation'.

Labelling – mental illness

Labelling theory developed by Becker (1963, p. 9) proposes that 'social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction creates deviance, and by applying those roles to particular people and labelling them as outsiders'. Labelling inevitably occurs throughout the articles that were analysed, and the label of mental illness is applied to both Stephen Griffiths and Joanna Dennehy.

Mental illness is the most prominent topic throughout all of the articles. From the research undertaken, the findings show that mental illness is the most frequent theme mentioned in all newspaper articles regarding Stephen Griffiths. Griffiths has a personality disorder that has been diagnosed by a psychiatrist. This is frequently played upon in the tabloid newspaper articles that were analysed, such as those in the *Daily Mail* and *The Mirror*. For example, Griffiths is described as 'a known psychopath who was obsessed with becoming a serial killer' (Brooke, Tozer, & Narin, 2010, para. 3) and a 'sadistic, schizoid psychopath' (Storrar, 2010, para. 34). At first sight, this finding suggests that the tabloid articles on Griffiths refute most of the literature on representations of murderers in the media. As alluded to in the literature review, it is female murderers who are portrayed as 'mad' and suffering from mental illness, while males rarely are. However, when further scrutinised, it could be suggested that mental illness is being used to displace the blame from Griffiths. Jewkes (2011) puts forward examples of women taking the blame for crimes they did not commit which were mentioned in this article's literature review. Griffiths does not have a partner, and, therefore, it is feasible to suggest that the tabloid newspapers have used his mental illness to take away the blame for his actions.

On the other hand, Joanna Dennehy is not portrayed as 'mad' in the way the literature suggests women are. Dennehy was diagnosed with the personality disorder paraphilia sadomasochism (Dodd, 2014, para. 19), but this is not mentioned at all in the tabloid newspapers analysed. Adjectives alluding to her mental state are briefly mentioned. For example, *The Mirror* (Smith, 2014b, para. 2–7) uses 'psycho' and 'bizarre', and, in another article (Smith, 2014a, para. 2), 'evil'. In contrast, the *Daily Mail* (Stevens & Camber, 2013) does not mention Dennehy's mental state at all. This is in stark contrast to the tabloid articles regarding Griffiths, which mention his mental illness extensively.

The broadsheet articles that were analysed do not seem to draw as much attention to Griffiths' mental illness. Similar phrases are used, though not as profusely as in the tabloid articles. These phrases include: 'a psychopath who was strongly attracted to killing people' (Stokes, 2010, para. 4) and 'a long history of mental illness' (Carter, 2010b, para. 4). However, there is a considerable difference in the portrayal of Dennehy's personality disorder. Unlike the tabloid articles, which hardly mention her illness, and instead portray her as 'bad', the broadsheets pay more attention to it. Dodd (2014, para. 4) pays particular attention, using phrases such as 'had told a psychiatrist that she killed "to see if I was as cold as I thought I was"'. Dodd's (2014) is the only article analysed that mentions Dennehy's personality disorder and describes what it entails, suggesting that this article is more factual rather than

sensationalising her illness. Conventionally, broadsheet newspapers are more factual than tabloids, and aim to educate their readers (Hanusch, 2013), instead of focusing on news values such as titillation. Therefore, this may be why Dennehy's mental illness is documented in *The Guardian* (Dodd, 2014) and has more attention drawn to it. It seems unusual that the tabloid articles do not write more about Dennehy's disorder. This is because, as a woman who has committed a crime, Dennehy is an 'other'. Having a mental illness makes her even more an 'other' (Jewkes, 2004). The lack of reporting of her personality disorder within the tabloid newspapers can possibly be explained as the writer blaming Dennehy for her crimes. She is a woman and therefore the media constructs her as blameworthy. This is because she is contravening social gender norms and does not reflect the outdated stereotype of the passive woman. Describing her mental illness in full could take away some of that blame, so therefore it is kept to a minimum.

There were some anomalies in the quotations collected from the newspaper articles. As mentioned above, both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers describe Griffiths as having a mental illness. However, one tabloid and one broadsheet article claim he has no personality disorder whatsoever. *The Telegraph* (Stokes, 2010, para. 4–13) openly contradicts itself. After describing Griffiths as 'a psychopath who was strongly attracted to killing people', the writer subsequently quotes the judge, Mr Justice Openshaw: 'Griffiths had no mental illness'. Thus, it is possible to assume that the writer uses the word 'psychopath' as a sensationalist term in order to draw the reader's attention. The *Daily Mail* (Wilson, 2010, para. 9–23) uses words that have connotations of mental illness, for example 'twisted' and 'neurotic'; however, it later states that Griffiths was 'manipulative, bullying, calculating and violent, but not mentally ill'. It further adds that 'this is hardly the action of a lunatic'. One explanation for the contradiction regarding Griffiths' mental illness could be that articles such as those in *The Telegraph* (Stokes, 2010) and *The Daily Mail* (Wilson, 2010) are presenting the case that Griffiths has been diagnosed with a personality disorder, though they may be arguing that this alone cannot explain his actions.

Labelling – sexualisation and de-humanisation

Following the writing of Jewkes (2004, 2011), in theory, the reporting of Dennehy's crimes should portray her as an 'evil monster' who is unfeminine and unnatural. In the tabloid newspapers that were analysed, this occurs to some extent. Dennehy is certainly portrayed as 'bad' (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002). For example *The Mirror* says 'the mum-of-two appears to be more concerned with her clothes than the men she left for dead' (Smith, 2014b, para. 13). A few things can be deduced from this sentence. Firstly, the stereotypical notion that women are concerned about their appearance is applied to Dennehy, which trivialises her and helps to strengthen the stereotype that femininity equals vanity. It is implied that she is 'bad' for paying more attention to her clothes than to the men she attempted to murder. Another point to add is that the writer mentions that she is a mother. Her children are not mentioned anywhere else in the article, and they are not involved in the story; however, Dennehy is labelled as a 'mum-of-two'. This implies that she is a bad mother and she is transgressing the laws of nature. Labelling her as a mother emphasises the 'natural' and care-giving role that women are supposed to undertake from a biological essentialist view. This supports Lloyd's (1995) writing on women being doubly deviant and doubly damned.

Other examples of Dennehy being portrayed as 'bad' in tabloid articles include in *The Mirror* (Smith, 2014a, para. 2): 'the evil 31-year-old gave a sinister grin'. This goes as far as explicitly stating that she is 'evil', instead of merely implying it. The *Daily Mail* (Stevens & Camber, 2013) also associates her with activities that may be deemed 'bad' when it implies she was a prostitute. It includes a quote from a neighbour claiming that Dennehy was a sex worker. However, this is anecdotal evidence that is unreliable, as this is mentioned in none of the other articles analysed. This is an example of sexualisation of a female offender, which is usually utilised in order to make a story more newsworthy. Other tabloid articles sexualise Dennehy by alluding to her promiscuity, though not to the extent that Jewkes (2004) suggests is usually the case in the reporting of female offenders. Phrases such as 'appeared to be flirting with...' (Smith, 2014a, para. 7) suggest she is sexually deviant. Jewkes (2011) suggests that if the media cannot represent a female offender as a lesbian, which is usually seen as transgressive in the media, then they portray them as having loose moral standards. Highlighting Dennehy's sexual actions supports Wykes' (1998) research, which proposes that the media reflects other socio-political institutions in their old-fashioned view of sex and marriage. Any woman who does not comply with expected social norms – for example, by being a single mother – is exposed to hostile representation. Dennehy is an example of this: *The Mirror* (Smith, 2014a, para. 7) calling her a 'mum-of-two' while describing her confirms that Dennehy deviating from social norms may be part of the reason for the negative portrayal.

Similar to the tabloids, the broadsheet newspapers in this research also represent Dennehy as 'bad'. Quotations from the judge calling her 'cruel, calculating and manipulative' (Tadeo, 2014, para. 7) and *The Guardian* stating that she 'was driven by a "sadistic lust" for blood' (Dodd, 2014, para. 5) illustrate this. The broadsheet articles imply that she is 'bad', though they do not explicitly state that she is. There is no use of the word 'evil', as there is in the tabloid articles.

A key difference between the broadsheet articles and the tabloid articles regarding labelling of the murderers is that the broadsheets do not sexualise Dennehy. This is perhaps because they do not need to rely on titillation to sell newspapers, as they cater to a different audience. There is no mention of prostitution. However there is a sentence in *The Guardian* that says: 'The third victim was her landlord and boss, Kevin Lee, 48, who Dennehy lured with the promise of sexual favours.' (Dodd, 2014, para. 10).

Griffiths is portrayed as 'mad' in the articles. However, the reporters tie this in with him also being 'bad'. Previous literature suggests that men are not represented as 'bad' nor vilified in the media as women are when they have committed a heinous crime (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Jewkes, 2011). The findings derived from the analysis of the selected tabloid articles suggest otherwise. Griffiths is described as 'monstrous and wicked' by *The Telegraph* (Stokes, 2010, para. 2), and 'evil' and 'abusive' by the *Daily Mail* (Brooke, Tozer, & Narin, 2010, para. 13). There does not appear to be any difference in the way tabloid and broadsheet newspapers describe him as 'bad'. In contrast to Dennehy, Griffiths is not sexualised at all; this concurs with Marsh and Melville's (2009) research, which states men's sexuality is rarely commented upon. He is perhaps not sexualised in the way Dennehy is because in

the media's view, he is male and, therefore, engaging in sexual behaviour is not so deviant because of his gender. The only reference to sex is in the *Daily Mail*, which says Griffiths was 'a let-down in bed' (Brooke, Tozer, & Narin, 2010, para. 62). This is not an example of sexualisation, but rather an insult to his masculinity, as he does not live up to the stereotypical view of a male.

A continual theme found in the research was the de-humanisation of Dennehy. Often in articles she was not initially called by name. She was referred to as 'a woman' by the *Daily Mail* (Stevens & Camber, 2013, para. 1), 'the 31-year-old psycho' by *The Mirror* (Smith, 2014b, para. 2) and 'the tattooed killer' by *The Mirror* (Smith, 2014a, para. 3). Marsh and Melville (2009) propose that the female appearance is scrutinised in the media, whereas this is not the case for men. *The Mirror's* reference to her tattoo supports this, even though Dennehy's appearance is not examined in a lot of detail. The mention of her tattoo could be reinforcing the view that she is 'masculine'. Although tattoos are becoming more acceptable, some may still hold the view that they are unfeminine. The de-humanisation of Dennehy by not using her name is carried out in both tabloids and broadsheets. This is not the case for Griffiths, who is referred to by name on all occasions, except for when he is called 'the criminology student' or 'the former public schoolboy' by the *Daily Mail* (2010, para. 1–2). These are not derogatory terms, and have positive connotations of being well educated. Therefore, they do not have the same de-humanising effect as referring to Griffiths by gender.

Blaming others

A reoccurring theme in the Griffiths articles is displacing the blame from him onto his parents, mainly his mother. Jewkes (2011) mentions that when a male commits a serious crime, the blame is usually displaced onto a wife or girlfriend because women are the default gender to blame. In Griffiths' case there was no current partner to blame. Instead, the media use the next best female substitute: his mother. Nearly every Griffiths article analysed mentions his upbringing. For example, in *The Guardian* (Carter, 2010a, para. 9) it is mentioned that 'his parents split up when he was a young boy' and that his father 'had not seen his son for 10 years'. The broadsheet articles only mention the fact that his parents were separated. However, the tabloid articles tacitly portray his parents in a negative way. The *Daily Mail* (2010, para. 38) mentions his private education and states that his parents 'are not wealthy'. The article then goes on to imply that they may have not paid the fees by themselves. Although not directly blaming his parents, in representing them negatively the articles succeed in creating the impression that Griffiths did not have a traditional upbringing. The reader may then gain the impression from reading these articles that his upbringing had some part in shaping his criminal activities. This represents the social constructionist perspective.

The *Daily Mail* (Brooke, Tozer, & Narin, 2010) has a long paragraph depicting Griffiths' mother in an unfavourable way. First, her conviction of falsely claiming benefits is mentioned, then her provocative nature is written about. This caters to the news value of titillation, as details such as her preference for alfresco sex are mentioned. This is an example of the media punishing a woman in an article because of her sexual activity (Wykes, 2001). It seems that in the *Daily Mail's* view, Griffiths' mother's promiscuity makes her a 'bad' mother and, therefore, she is to blame for his crimes. There is perhaps a subtle implication that because of her

sexual nature, Griffiths took this out on his victims, who were sex workers. There is no subtle implication in the other *Daily Mail* article (Wilson, 2010, para. 27); instead, it reports that Griffiths had a 'savage hatred' of women and that this was a reaction to 'the reported promiscuity of his mother, whose endless liaisons are said to have featured alfresco sex in her back garden'.

In contrast to Griffiths, Dennehy is fully blamed for her crimes, as alluded to in the mental illness theme. As a woman who is portrayed as 'evil', there is no one to blame but herself. Unlike Griffiths' mother, her parents are not scrutinised in the same way. In fact, quite the opposite occurs: her parents are portrayed in a positive light, despite their daughter's crimes. The *Daily Mail* (Stevens & Camber, 2013) mentions that her parents had not seen her in a while and were devastated by the news of her crimes. The tabloid newspapers were, perhaps, more willing to portray Dennehy's parents in a positive way because they could not find any scandal in their lives, and without scandal, the story is not newsworthy.

The broadsheet newspapers that were analysed have nothing whatsoever in their reporting to suggest that anyone else was to blame except Dennehy herself. However, they do not scrutinise Dennehy to the same extent as the tabloid newspapers, and they do not go as far as to subtly suggest that she is 'bad' despite her parents, as do tabloid newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* (Stevens & Camber, 2013).

It could be assumed that Griffiths is not held fully responsible for his crimes because he is a man, while Dennehy is held responsible for hers because she is a woman. This could be because, as a man, Griffiths' violent behaviour is not as surprising as Dennehy's actions are. In other words, it can be assumed that tabloid newspapers support the view that men are 'supposed' to be violent and, therefore, that they are not entirely to blame when they carry out violent crimes. However, when women do so, this is a transgression of their gender expectations and, therefore, in the eyes of the media, they are to blame. On the other hand, there are other possibilities to consider. Dennehy may be blamed because of factors such as the nature of her crime or how she acted. If she had committed the exact same crime and had been male, it is possible she could have been depicted in the same way. The same is true for Griffiths: if he had been female and committed the same crimes, the newspapers may have portrayed him in the same way. Therefore, it is impossible to claim that either offender was portrayed in such a way because of their gender, unless they had committed the same crime.

Conclusion

This research set out to explore whether the reporting on serial murderers changed according to their gender in both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. The case studies in question were Stephen Griffiths and Joanna Dennehy. This study aimed to update literature that was written in the 1990s and the early 2000s, as representations may have changed since then as a result of social circumstances. The research had two aims: to explore whether murderers are represented differently according to their gender in tabloid newspapers, and to explore whether murderers are represented differently according to their gender in broadsheet newspapers.

The findings of this study were analysed in the previous section. It discussed how the themes 'labelling' (split into 'mental illness' and 'sexualisation and de-humanisation') and 'blaming others' were identified during the thematic analysis undertaken. Regarding 'mental illness', in answer to the research aims it can be deduced that an example of a male murderer (Griffiths) is portrayed with some similarities to an example of a female murderer (Dennehy); however, there are differences. Both their mental illnesses are mentioned in broadsheet newspapers, Griffiths' to a slightly higher degree. However, the tabloid newspapers tend to neglect Dennehy's illness, while keeping some labelling terms regarding mental illness for newsworthy effect.

The theme of 'sexualisation and de-humanisation' illustrated the disparities of the reporting of male and female murderers. Dennehy is portrayed differently to Griffiths as she is sexualised by the tabloid newspapers, whereas Griffiths' sex life is mostly left private. Again, this is more prominent in the tabloid newspapers, although the broadsheet newspapers de-humanise Dennehy to some extent. However, there are some similarities. Both murderers are depicted as 'bad' and 'dangerous'. The *Daily Mail* (Stevens & Camber, 2013, para. 15) report that the police 'urged the public not to approach her', regarding Dennehy. This directly refutes the work of Frei (2008), who states that in the media, women are rarely depicted as dangerous in the way that men are.

In the theme 'blaming others', it was found that there is a large disparity between the reporting on Griffiths and the reporting on Dennehy in terms of where the blame is placed. For example, the blame is placed on Griffiths' mother, and her actions are scrutinised in the tabloid newspapers. It is insinuated that her parenting led Griffiths to undertake his crimes. However, the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers both display Dennehy's parents in a positive way and their parenting is not questioned, despite the crimes Dennehy committed. Overall, this theme supports the literature that suggests that blame is placed on female figures in a male offender's life (Jewkes, 2004). It also suggests there are disparities in the reporting on male and female offenders in the media, although the sample used is not large enough to make a definitive statement.

In answer to the first research aim, Griffiths was portrayed as mentally ill in tabloid articles, whereas this was not focused on for Dennehy. It was suggested that this was due to blame being placed on Dennehy as she is a woman, while this did not happen for Griffiths because the tabloid newspapers accentuated his illness, therefore taking away some of the blame. Furthermore, Dennehy was de-humanised throughout the tabloid articles and was sexualised through the discussion of the sexual element of her crimes. However, sex was not mentioned in order to sexualise Griffiths, even though the victims of his murders were sex workers. Finally, Dennehy was blamed extensively in the tabloid newspapers and no one else shared the blame, even though she had an accomplice, Gary Stretch. Griffiths committed his crimes alone; however, the blame was still placed on his mother for his upbringing.

In answer to the second research aim, murderers are portrayed differently in broadsheet newspapers according to their gender. However, this is marginal, and does not occur to the same extent as in tabloid newspapers. For instance, there were not as many disparities in the reporting of mental illness. Dennehy's disorder was mentioned in the broadsheet articles. Moreover the broadsheet newspapers de-

humanised Dennehy to some extent, though they did not attempt to sexualise her. Finally, as previously mentioned, there were not as many differences in how Dennehy's parents were portrayed compared with Griffiths' in the tabloid newspapers.

This research had some limitations. Documentary analysis can be easily influenced by researcher's biases, although every precaution was undertaken to ensure this was avoided. Furthermore, although researching two case studies of murderers allowed for an in-depth analysis, it meant that the findings may not be generalisable, as the sample was too small. Expanding the sample of murderers and newspapers analysed would add to the findings discovered in this study. Further research of the same kind with different case studies would improve the findings of this research. More recommendations for future research include investigating whether the gender of the reporter affects the representation of the murderer and researching how the representation of male and female murderers has changed in newspapers over time. Future studies into these areas would improve society's understanding of disparities in reporting of murderers, allowing the way female and male murderers are reported in newspapers to be challenged more effectively.

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Appendix I

This appendix shows the articles analysed in this research.

Griffiths - tabloid	Griffiths - broadsheet	Dennehy – tabloid	Dennehy - broadsheet
<p>Brooke, C., Tozer, J., & Narin, J. (2010, December 22). 'My Shelly's mutilated body is probably in that rucksack': Father of Crossbow Cannibal victim tells of trauma after seeing CCTV of killer. <i>Daily Mail</i>. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1340673/Crossbow-Cannibal-Stephen-Griffiths-told-officers-intended-murder-women.html</p>	<p>Carter, H. (2010a, December 21). Stephen Griffiths: The self-styled demon who drew inspiration from serial killers. <i>The Guardian</i>. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/dec/21/stephen-griffiths-crossbow-cannibal-profile</p>	<p>McDermott, K. (2013, May 7). Woman charged with murder of three men after their bodies were found in ditches. <i>Daily Mail</i>. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2320732/Joanna-Dennehy-Peterborough-woman-charged-murder-3-men-bodies-ditches.html</p>	<p>Dodd, V. (2014, February 28). Joanna Dennehy: serial killer becomes first woman told by judge to die in jail. <i>The Guardian</i>. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/28/joanna-dennehy-serial-killer-first-woman-die-in-jail</p>
<p><i>Daily Mail</i>. (2010, May 29). 'I am the Crossbow Cannibal': Murder suspect charged with</p>	<p>Carter, H. (2010b, December 22). 'Crossbow Cannibal' could continue criminology studies in prison. <i>The Guardian</i>. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/dec/22</p>	<p>Smith, L. (2014a, February 14). Serial killer Joanna Dennehy laughs and says she is</p>	<p>Kendall, B. (2013, May 7). Joanna Dennehy charged with murder of three men after bodies are found in ditches. <i>The Independent</i>. Retrieved from http://www.independ</p>

<p>killing three prostitutes in extraordinary court appearance. <i>Daily Mail</i>. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1282131/PhD-student-Stephen-Griffiths-tells-court-crossbow-cannibal.html</p>	<p>/crossbow-cannibal-criminology-studies-prison</p>	<p>'not sorry' for stabbing three men to death. <i>The Mirror</i>. Retrieved from http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/serial-killer-joanna-dennehy-laughs-3146590</p>	<p>ent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/joanna-dennehy-charged-with-murder-of-three-men-after-bodies-are-found-in-ditches-8606305.html</p>
<p>Storrar, K. (2010, December 22). Crossbow Cannibal's victims were cut up and eaten. <i>The Mirror</i>. Retrieved from http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/crossbow-cannibals-victims-were-cut-270904</p>	<p>Norfolk, A. (2010, May 29). The accused gazed at victims' relatives: 'I'm the Crossbow Cannibal' he said: Tears and gasps as Stephen Griffiths appears in court. <i>The Times</i>, (London, England).</p>	<p>Smith, L. (2014b, February 28). Video: Smiling serial killer Joanna Dennehy laughs and jokes at police station just minutes after being arrested. <i>The Mirror</i>. Retrieved from http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/joanna-dennehy-smiling-serial-killer-3190908</p>	<p>Tadeo, M. (2014, February 28). Triple murderer Joanna Dennehy sentenced to life in prison. <i>The Independent</i>. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/triple-murderer-joanna-dennehy-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-9160180.html</p>
<p>Wilson, D. (2010, December</p>	<p>Stokes, P. (2010, December 22). Crossbow cannibal</p>	<p>Stevens, J., & Camber, R. (2013,</p>	<p>The Telegraph. (2014, February 28). 'Cruel, calculating'</p>

<p>23). How Crossbow Cannibal had a sex-mad mother and an obsession with fame that turned him into a serial killer by criminologist who helped police. <i>Daily Mail</i>. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1340980/Crossbow-Cannibal-Stephen-Griffiths-fame-obsession-led-serial-killer.html</p>	<p>Stephen Griffiths will die in jail. <i>The Independent</i>. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8218296/Crossbow-cannibal-Stephen-Griffiths-will-die-in-jail.html</p>	<p>November 19). Woman, 31, admits to being a serial killer as she stuns court by pleading guilty to murdering three men and dumping their bodies in ditches. <i>Daily Mail</i>. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2509256/Joanna-Dennehy-pleads-guilty-killing-3-Cambridgeshire-men.html</p>	<p>serial killer Joanna Dennehy gets full life tariff. <i>The Telegraph</i>. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/10668196/Cruel-calculating-serial-killer-Joanna-Dennehy-gets-full-life-tariff.html</p>
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